



CAN GENERAL HOSPITAL BE RECUSCITATED?

Short-lived Ratings Spike Proves GH Still Has a Pulse.

But Will It Last? If Not, Why?

The week of July 20-24, 2009 showed an improvement in the state of ratings for General Hospital (GH), or so it seemed. As stated in ABC's own press release for that week, GH generated its biggest women 18-49 audience in 6 weeks with 889,000. Likewise GH generated its largest total viewer's numbers, 2.7 million, in 4 months during the same week. Unfortunately those numbers are misleading. While it is true that GH did generate its largest total viewers in 4 months, it lost 691,000 viewers between Tuesday, July 21 (3,086,000) and Friday, July 24 (2,395,000). Additionally, GH's total viewers declined by 106,000 viewers the week ending July 31 while Y&R, B&B, DOOL and OLTL all gained viewers. With respect to the women 18-49 demographic, there was an 8% loss for the week ending July 31 when compared to the previous week while, again, Y&R, B&B, DOOL, and OLTL all gained in this demographic. GH also declined by 53%, 87,000 to 46,000 viewers, the week of July 31 in the important summer time girls 12-17 demographic, whereas the week before they were ranked Number 1. In that demographic, GH dropped from 1st to 4th place in only one week.

What does this mean for GH? It means the audience is there, literally waiting as if in a waiting room to see if GH will pull itself out of the self-induced coma it's been put in by the writers by turning out plot-driven stunt scripts that cause the ratings to spike and then crash. On July 20 and 21, GH garnered a 2.0 (2,736,000) and 2.2 (3,086,000) respectively for daily ratings. It is clear that the audience was interested in seeing the reveal of who was the father of Claudia's baby, the conclusion of the hit and run with Claudia, Carly, Michael, Kristina and Alexis, and the proposal with Maxie and Spinelli. The culmination of these story lines over these two days drew in numbers of fans that GH has not, by ABC's own admission, drawn in weeks. Unfortunately, once these story lines reached their peak and the audience received the information whether Claudia lived or died, who may or may not have hit her, if the baby she was carrying was Sonny's or Ric's, and if Maxie said yes or no to Spinelli's romantic rooftop proposal, they tuned out again.

It is becoming more evident that management does not have a hand on the pulse of what most viewers want to see. Many viewers were not interested in the rest of the week's agenda or plot

points showcasing a dumbed-down Jason who could not figure out how to repair his SUV or bypass the addition Spinelli had put on it without Samantha's help, even though he once owned a motorcycle mechanic shop and is well-known for his extremely logical and mathematical mind as a result of his accident. Furthermore, many did not seem interested in watching the continuation of Jason's 'Nanny-like' duties whereby he counseled the younger brother of one of the two teens on the run and then went after said teens with the woman those same viewers remember as endangering his own child. They were not motivated to spend time watching the 'Enforcer' chase his way to Mexico, reminiscing about past trips along side someone who betrayed him so blatantly, while he completely ignores and never even mentions his own child or his child's mother that he is supposed to love and have sacrificed for both their safety. Additionally, the predictability of the summer 'teen on the run' storyline has done little to hold the interest of many as evidenced by the crash of the teen demographic dropping from Number 1 to Number 4 in one week.

Many viewers were not interested in watching Sonny Corinthos act out against his son who recently awakened from being in a coma for a year. They did not want to watch the loving father who sat by his son's bedside, crying over the fact that he was shot while with him, suddenly act out-of-character and blame him for causing the miscarriage of his unborn child and call him a coward for not staying at the scene of the hit-and-run. Oddly, in the next episode, Sonny went from being Mr. Hyde to Dr. Jekyll by acting totally different in his scenes with Michael, so that one who had not watched the day before would have never known he had treated Michael in such an out-of-character manner. Many viewers were equally turned off by Sonny's sudden desire to pursue Olivia while his current wife was having a test to find out if the baby she was carrying was his, while Kate, the woman he loves, lives next door to him. The manner in which Sonny has pursued Olivia has been noted as sleazy and even menacing by some viewers. Many are appalled that he uses his knowledge that she has feelings for him by pressuring her to "be with him," saying that Kate deserves better and basically implying he could settle for "being with" Olivia. This misogynistic view just adds to the almost daily dose of sleaze dispensed to viewers. Making this popular lead male character look more foolish is that he keeps bird-dogging Olivia while two of his children are on the run, instead of going to search for them.

Many were not interested in watching Claudia seek revenge against the child she put into a coma simply because she believes he may have caused the accident that resulted in her miscarrying. Seemingly the same can be said for their lack of interest in seeing her call upon Jerry Jacks, the man she most recently tried to have killed, to ask him to track down her step-son, and his own step-nephew, and bring him to her for retribution, all while pushing away her brother who has always stood by her. Those that did watch were rewarded with her horrid behavior toward the brother that she's always claimed to be the reason for her every action, the one person she actually loves. Too bad viewers did not receive a sucker or other treat at the end of this painful experience like one does after a young child's doctor's appointment.

Numbers of fans were apparently not interested in watching Nikolas's inconsistent and even slightly creepy behavior with Rebecca and then Elizabeth. One minute he was upset that Rebecca

is no longer living with him and acted out by riding his horses recklessly, then he was acting flirtatious with Elizabeth. In the next scene he was at the Quartermaine's trying to discuss Rebecca's living arrangements with her and an angry Edward, just as he did when Emily was alive, only to be made to leave, just as he was with Emily. Next Nikolas was rescuing Edward and Rebecca from their confines in the PCPD. Suddenly he and Rebecca were entering Jake's together when he had to step in to break up a fight his two brothers were having in the name of protecting their sister. They had drinks, danced, and went back to the Quartermaine home and almost make it up to her room before Edward once again threw Nikolas out. Next he was back at Jake's having drinks with Elizabeth and, after professing his love for Rebecca and playing the song they danced to on the jukebox, told Liz that whenever he drinks, he wants to kiss her. All of this has happened in what seems to be the same day. As usual, Nikolas has never once even mentioned his son, which is just one more symptom of GH's continued diseased state.

Many viewers were appalled at the concocted storyline that had Lucky and Ethan bonding over beating up Dante for no reason. Lucky is a detective and would not simply beat someone up because they worked for Sonny Corinthos, even if they were talking to his sister. Even when Lucky had concerns about Lulu with Johnny, he did not attempt to beat him up senselessly. To have him behave this way is an obvious attempt at having him "bond" with his 'brother' in some way. It is unbelievable and uncharacteristic after months of Lucky wanting nothing to do with Ethan, that he is suddenly willing to sacrifice his good standing as an officer with the PCPD to bond with a brother he doesn't even want much less believe he is related to.

Many fans apparently had little interest in watching Olivia reveal the she knew about Johnny and Claudia's involvement with Michael's shooting, while saying that Jax did not want her to tell, when she was the one who first suggested he destroy the DVD that held proof of the Zacchara's involvement in the shooting that placed Michael in a coma for a year. Viewers question if her willingness to keep this secret (which put her in collusion with Johnny), along with several other secrets, will ever come to light and result in any sort of payoff for the viewers who are unhappy with her manipulative, hypocritical, lying ways. Viewers were confused by Olivia declaring she did not know what Dante did for a living, but later knew exactly what he did for a living. Fans and non-fans of the Olivia character have trouble keeping up with the many rewrites that surround her.

What is unfortunate about all of this is that, due to the blatant degradation of characters and lack of character integrity, along with the lack of historical continuity or respect for the audience's memory or knowledge of the storylines, fans that were tuning in for the two short days that the ratings spiked, stopped. They did not witness how Carly and Jax were striving to remain calm and do whatever was necessary to save their child. They missed out on watching how Carly has matured since being away from Sonny and by being with Jax. They missed out on how she has become a more caring parent and partner, and how she leans on him and not only Jason any longer. Carly and Jax are a couple who are fighting together to keep their pregnancy healthy while also striving to keep Michael and Morgan safe. They are a family that is working against the odds together and not giving up. They are one of the few bright spots on GH these days.

There are obvious bumps in the road headed their way, but viewers can see how they have become partners and a true couple through their love and the trials and tribulations they have had to endure. They have qualities that GH needs to showcase, making them an example of one of the couples the SOS/Save Our Soap! GH Campaign believes should be a positive foundation on which GH should build.

Sadly, by tuning out, fans were not privy to the scenes where Maxie was trying to explain her feelings for Spinelli to Lulu. The audience missed the friendship that now exists between these two one time enemies as Maxie confided in Lulu and then invited her to join her at a family dinner. The audience was not present to witness the fact that Maxie, while still young and somewhat immature, has given thought to Spinelli's feelings and been honest with herself, and Lulu, about her own feelings on marriage, though she has not been quite honest with Spinelli just yet. There were far fewer fans by the end of the week of July 24 and even fewer the following week, to witness the all too seldom familial exchanges between Mac and Maxie and the other members of the Scorpio/Jones/Drake family. It was refreshing to see Patrick and Robin mentioning their daughter and Robin's Postpartum Depression while at work as a normal couple would. While their sudden ability to have so much time to devote to the PI business is more than a little curious, and appears to be another example of the inability to have multiple character storylines on-going at the same time, those that did watch were repaid with loving and supportive scenes. Once again however, these rewarding moments of humor and interaction between these legacy family members were all too brief for those fans that had tuned in.

These are the situations that fans want to see more of. The audience wants to see more family interactions and friendships. It was wonderful to see Monica and Edward and Tracy during the brief scenes they shared together. While GH has shown some minor improvement by showing more of some of the characters that viewers want to see, those improvements are overshadowed by the glaring writing inadequacies. The writers need to pay attention to what works—what has worked in the past and what is working now. They need to truly write for the legacy families like the Quartermaines (Monica, Tracy, Edward), the Spencers (Luke, Bobbie, Lulu, Laura, Lucky, Lucas), the Scorpios (Robert and Anna), the Drakes (Robin, Patrick, Noah, Emma and Matt), and build upon them and their relationships, not just place them in situational scenes. They need to utilize the characters that are a part of GH's rich history and later generations of legacy families like Jason, Elizabeth, and Carly, and build their relationships and families. They need to focus more on the familial aspects and less on the mob-related aspects, of veteran character Sonny Cornithos. They need to allow Jax to strengthen his family ties by letting him have a child of his own with Carly.

In addition, many fans want to see more traditions upheld and more friendships explored. They want to see the reading of the Christmas story at the annual hospital Christmas party and a renewal of the Nurses' Ball. The writers would do well to have Kate Howard be a member of the hospital board and be the hostess of the Nurses' Ball. Fans want to see more of ladies' night out with Robin, Lainey, Kelly and Liz or ladies' night out with friends Diane, Alexis and Kate.

Port Charles has traditionally been a town made up of families and friendships, not just individuals that rarely interact with more than one or two people. While viewers enjoy scenes with these characters, they crave well-written storylines that help to thread or tie these familial and friendly moments together. They want to see stories that maintain the rich history of the show and engage the audience. Destroying characters and history insults the intelligence of the viewers, especially those that have been invested for many years, and frustrates or aggravates many to the point of tuning out. When characters are written out-of-character and long- and short-term history is rewritten, as is becoming standard operating procedure on GH, the resulting storylines make little sense. Loyal viewers find it hard to become invested in the changed characters and changed storylines after being emotionally invested in the characters and original storylines. Viewers do not have amnesia! On GH, the constant changes have become like a cancer invading the entire show.

The goal of the SOS campaign is to bring to the attention of those in charge of GH that the show needs to be stabilized and nursed back to health to stop the hemorrhaging of viewers and keep this soap alive. This diagnosis is followed by ten remedies that are basic elements of good soap writing—character-driven storylines, character growth and development, historical continuity/integrity, respect for the characters, emotional balance for characters and storylines, focus on families, enduring couples that viewers can root for, less sleaze, more romance and humor, and an overall enjoyable escape.

ABC Daytime should have issued a Code Blue on GH months ago when the ratings began to fall below 2.0. That should have been an early warning that changes needed to take place before viewers, many of them viewers for many years, started to tune out. The soap genre includes many of the longest- running programs in television history. Viewers often grow up watching these programs and often view with their children, who become the next generation of soap viewers. Sadly, many viewers are now saying they do not feel they can even let their children watch GH in its current state. These long-time viewers are the consumers that management should be targeting with a high-quality product. It is easier to chart the progress of a show and strive to maintain viewership than to lose viewers and try to gain them back. Unfortunately, the GH writers have lost the trust of many of its viewers. What makes this situation even more perplexing is that GH is a part of ABC Daytime, which is a part of ABC/Disney. Viewers/consumers expect more from a product with the Disney label.

Every week, more and more fans of GH are joining together with fans of Sonny and Kate, Jason and Elizabeth, Patrick and Robin, and Jax and Carly as part of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign. All share in a common goal of asking ABC/Disney to listen to the viewers and cure this ailing show by making the changes needed to make GH the quality show it once was and can become again, as well as making it a viable show in the ratings and rankings. For more information regarding the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at saveoursoapgh@gmail.com, visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital page on Facebook or visit the new the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital website at www.saveoursoapgh.com.